

Site guide



Birding in Kieni Forest

Nick Gardner

Kieni Forest forms part of the extensive Kikuyu Escarpment Forest lying east of the Rift Valley at approximately 2,150–2,700 m. Despite its close proximity to Nairobi it remains one of Kenya's best kept secrets.

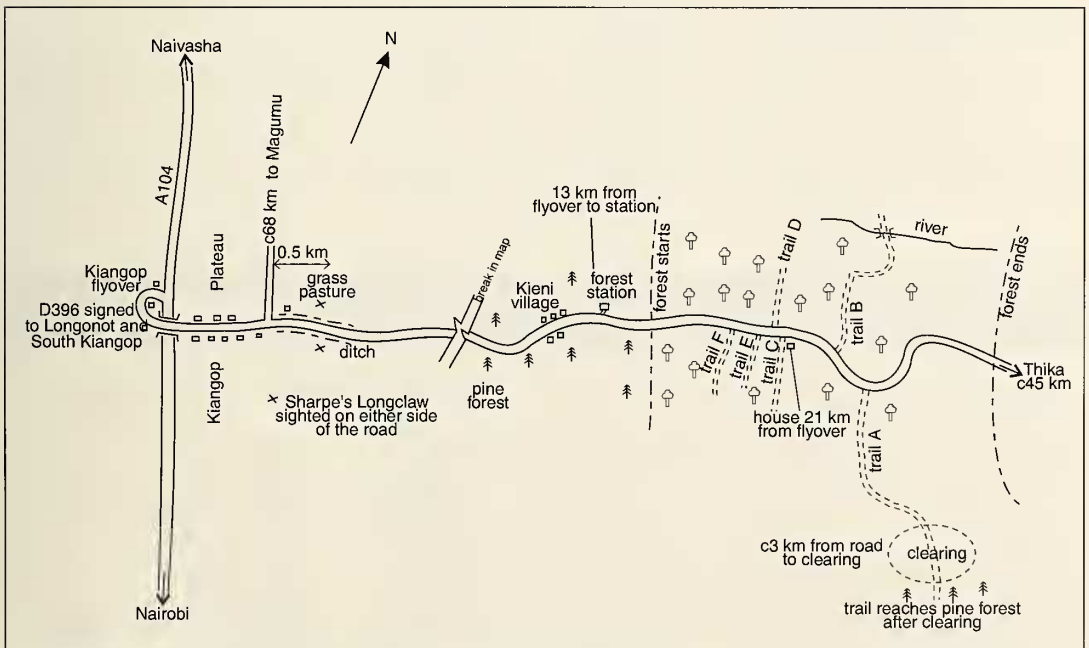
Amongst the regular species at Kieni which can be difficult to see elsewhere in Kenya are Olive Ibis *Bostrychia olivacea*, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon *Columba delegorguei*, Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx montanus*, Bar-tailed Trogon *Apaloderma vittatum*, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike *Malaconotus nigrifrons*, Abbott's Starling *Cinnyricinclus femoralis*, Sharpe's Starling *C. sharpii*, Waller's Chestnut-winged Starling *Onychognathus walleri*, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher *Trochocercus albonotatus* and Abyssinian Crimsonwing *Cryptospiza salvadorii*.

Getting there

The forest is easily accessible from Nairobi with a good tarmac road from Kieni to Thika crossing most of the area's habitats.

From Nairobi head north-west on the new A104 towards Naivasha. Turn off east after about 50 km on the D396 (flyover) which is signposted to Longonot and South Kiangop. Pass through the small village of Kamae. Just beyond the village is a left-hand turn (the C68 to Magumu). Shortly after the turn you pass through an area of rough grassland on either side of the road. Look here for the endemic Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei*.

After leaving this area continue along the D396 until you reach Kieni Forest approximately 18 km from the A104. The D396 is rough in places but with care is readily drivable in a two-wheel-drive vehicle.



Map of Kieni Forest region
Carte de la région de forêt de Kieni



Bar-tailed Trogon
Apaloderma vittatum
Chris Gibbins

Alternatively the forest can be reached by driving north-east from Nairobi along the A2 towards Thika for about 40 km. Just before Thika turn west on to the tarmac C66 and follow this for about 45 km until you reach the forest.

Accommodation can be found in Thika, Naivasha or Mangu, which lies between Thika and the forest.

Birding

The map on the previous page shows some of the tracks accessible from the main road. Many of these tracks go through steep-sided and heavily forested valleys and most of these are worth exploring if time permits. Much of the forest is secondary growth but there appear to be remnant patches of primary forest along the permanent stream behind the house.

In December 1994 a dawn start at the good viewing area just west of trail A produced small flocks of Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeons and Waller's Chest-

nut-winged Starlings perched in the tops of emergent trees. The damp area along trail A was good for Bar-tailed Trogon, Abyssinian Ground-Thrush *Zoothera piaggiae*, White-browed Crombec *Sylvietta leucophrys* and White-tailed Crested Flycatcher and all of these species, with the exception of the ground-thrush, were also seen along trail E.

Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo was heard intermittently at several places along the road and was seen (in response to playback) along trail E. This track also produced Black-fronted Bush-shrike.

Taylor and Taylor¹ describe Olive Ibis as a not uncommon resident of the area which is most frequently seen at dawn and dusk. In March 1995 two British birders, Graham Speight and Mike Hunter, saw two birds flying over trail A calling on two consecutive mornings. Both sightings were roughly an hour after dawn.

Although a minimum of two or three days is really necessary to do the area any sort of justice those birders with limited time would be well advised to attempt to spend at least a morning in the area.

Anyone requiring further details about this excellent area is welcome to contact me at the address below. Alternatively further information on this site is included in Mike Hunter's excellent trip report which is available from the African Bird Club for UK£9 including postage and packing. ☺

References

1. Taylor, P.B and Taylor C.A. 1988. The status, movements and breeding of some birds in the Kikuyu Escarpment Forest, Central Kenyan Highland. *Tauraco* 1: 72-89.

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